

# UK to relax coronavirus curbs over Christmas

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Coronavirus restrictions on social mixing and travel will be eased across the UK over Christmas to allow up to three households to celebrate the festive season together, officials said Tuesday.

The arrangement will be in force from December 23 to 27, according to a joint statement by the administrations of all four UK nations: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

"As 2020 draws to a close, we recognise it has been an incredibly difficult year for us all," the statement said.

"We have all had to make significant sacrifices in our [everyday lives](#), and many religious and [community groups](#) have already had to change or forgo their customary celebrations to slow the spread of coronavirus and save lives," it said.

"This cannot be a 'normal' Christmas. But as we approach the festive period, we have been working closely together to find a way for family and friends to see each other, even if it is for a short time, and recognising that it must be both limited and cautious."

The UK's constituent nations administer separate health policies, and have had varying restrictions in place against the [coronavirus](#) pandemic.

In England, a four-week lockdown is due to end on December 2 and the country will revert to regionalised restrictions, depending on the number of cases in different parts of the country.

Those include curbs on travel into and out of virus hotspots.

But over the Christmas period, all curbs on travel will be lifted UK-wide.

People travelling to and from Northern Ireland will have an extra day of travel either side of the five-day window.

The relaxation for three households to mix will apply only to private

homes, outdoor spaces and places of worship, the statement said.

## **Family contact 'crucial'**

Tighter curbs will still mean smaller groups of people meeting in pubs and restaurants, where those are permitted to remain open.

Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said that contact with friends and family was "crucial during this time as isolation and loneliness can hit people especially hard over the Christmas period".

But she warned there would be no easing of restrictions around New Year, which is usually a huge celebration in Scotland.

Welsh First Minister Mark Drakeford said that he had some "hesitation" about easing the rules, but that "it is better that we have a common set of arrangements" across Britain "that give people a framework that they can manage within and act responsibly within as well."

Britain has now recorded almost 56,000 deaths of people testing positive for the virus, the worst toll in Europe.

Official data released Tuesday showed that the total number of deaths occurring in Britain was 19 percent higher than the average for the week ending November 13, with North West England and neighbouring Yorkshire hardest hit.

The country reported 608 deaths on Tuesday, the highest daily total since May, although the number of new cases reported was the lowest since mid-October.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said earlier in the day that the rollout of a vaccine could herald a return to "normal" life by Easter.

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